

A First Timer's Guide to Selling a Home in North Carolina

By: Jay Luebke



A Note From the Author

If you bought your first home in the last few years, there's a good chance that you've built up a good bit of equity. Even with today's interest rates, many of my clients — especially those who bought a home prior to 2022 — are ready to move up into their next home.

They want to make smart financial decisions, unlock some of the equity in their homes, and move into the next chapter; balancing cash, downpayment and future mortgage payment into the right equation.

This guide is written specifically for you: the first-time seller who wants to understand how this all works. What can you do to avoid stress, and how can you make the smartest decisions with your money. My goal is to answer some of your biggest questions, paint the picture of what happens next, give you any guidance and examples I have from past experience and help you feel confident about your next move.

With that, let's get into it.

The Game Plan

Step 1: Know your Numbers



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Before you start thinking about showings or open houses, you need a clear picture of what selling will look like financially.

- How much equity do I have in my home?
- What is my current monthly payment?
- What would my new payment be and am I comfortable with that?
- Will I use any of the money I make from selling my current house to pay off any other kind of debt (student loans, credit cards, cars, etc.)?
- Am I planning to put all of the money from the sale of my current home into the down payment of my next home, or do I want to stock up my savings account?

Okay, what else...

When it comes time to guestimating your walk away number, there are some calculations that come into play. You'll want to gather the following information:

Estimated Value/Sale Price: The market value of your home based on recent comparable sales. I'm happy to run the sales in a similar way an appraiser would look at recent sales, or you can ballpark based on the Zestimate.

Closing Costs to Keep in Mind:

- Real estate commission (both to your listing agent and the buyers agent)
- Sales Tax - in North Carolina, this is called 'excise tax' or 'revenue stamps'.
 - They're easily calculated at \$2 per \$1,000 of purchase price. Ex. \$400,000 sales price = \$800 tax.
- Attorney fees (in North Carolina, closings are handled by attorneys, not title or escrow companies like they use in Selling Sunset...)
- Repairs or any credits you give to the buyer.

Your Mortgage Payoff: What you still owe on your loan if you have one.
Net Proceeds: What's left over — the money you take to your next home.

To make life super simple, I put together a worksheet that you can use to get an idea of what your walk away number could look like. BE AWARE that this is for informational purposes only at this point. We'll do a specific 'Seller Net' sheet for every single offer you receive.

Preparing your home for the market

Step 2: Prep Like a Pro

What does it look like to prep like a Pro?

Okay, we sorted out the money part and things are looking good. You might actually move forward on this, sell your house and buy your next one. What do I need to do to get my home ready for the market? First impressions matter. A few smart improvements and a little bit of time/effort can help your home sell faster and for more money.

Top Prep Priorities:

- **Declutter and depersonalize:** We don't need to fully sterilize the place, but we need to start the packing process. Does your husband love the Vikings? Great. Let's tone down the purple. Do we have a montage of every vacation we've ever taken on the wall? Let's pull a few of those pictures down. Do you have your baby's name on the wall in their bedroom? Yes, it's cute but the world doesn't need to know your child's name and address (think about this one more as a safety and privacy recommendation, too.).
- **Fresh paint in neutral colors:** No, we don't necessarily need to repaint the entire house (unless we've banged it up and it could really use it...) Use your buyer eyes. Would you take the house off your list if it was in the current condition?
- **Deep clean carpets and floors:** A good cleaning goes a long way, especially if we have pets and kiddos.
- **Enhance curb appeal:** Before photos and showings, let's make sure we cut the grass, maybe add some mulch/pine straw where needed, and just give the outside a little clean up.



Another way to look at making sure your home is prepped for the market is by reviewing the Property Disclosure, which is effectively the report card for your home. Sellers are required to disclose significant problems, called material facts, that they are aware of in major systems of the house, and are encouraged to share any other known details (ex. Age of the roof, type of pipes, etc.).

Some of these are easy answers, and some may require a bit of discovery. If there are items on the list that you would answer "Yes, there's a problem" to, it's a good time to consider repairs to make sure the transaction moves as smoothly as possible.

Getting the most money

Step 3: Price and Position Strategically



Pricing Strategy in Today's Market

We don't just pick a number out of thin air when it comes to pricing. At the end of the day, it's a strategy. Price too high, and you risk sitting on the market. Price correctly, and you can attract multiple offers.

Our Approach:

- Review recent sales in your neighborhood.
- Look at the competition
- Factor in market trends and seasonality.

From here, we can pick a strategy based on your goals. If we need to move quickly, we might opt to price aggressively to get as many offers as possible. If we have a bit of extra time, maybe we consider testing the market.

Visibility is key

Step 4: Market with Maximum Exposure

Hit the Market with Maximum Exposure

This isn't about just sticking a sign in the yard and praying for a buyer. Today's homebuyers start their search online and on social media. We want to make sure to meet our buyers where they are and get as many eyeballs as possible on your property.

What this looks like for all of my listings:

- Professional photography and videography.
- A custom floor plans of your home.
- Social media campaigns targeting local buyers.
- Outreach to local agents.
- Immediate information shared with buyers directly from your yard sign.
- Syndication to all major real estate websites, including Zillow, Realtor.com, Homes.com, my own website, and 110+ others through a partnership with my brokerage.

Based on other factors, we may look to get exposure in different ways, but we'll discuss this when the time comes.

Finding the buyer

Step 5: Showings & Time on the Market



Putting your Home on the Market

We'll plan to put your home into the MLS on a Thursday. You pick which Thursday, I just need a few business days heads up to make sure I've got all my ducks in a row. Putting your home into the MLS on a Thursday gives time for your listing to hit all of the saved buyer searches prior to the weekend.

We start showings on a Friday. If we're priced correctly (and the world hasn't gone to s#!t), we should see showing requests that first weekend.

My rule of thumb is that we should be seeing a minimum of 1-2 showings per week if we're priced correctly. If we're not seeing any showings, it means that buyers are ruling us out because of price or location. If we get to 14-21 days without showings, the market is rejecting us and we need to adjust the price.

But let's focus on the positives:

If we're getting more showings than 1-2 showings per week, it means we're right in line and we need to find the right buyer. It doesn't mean we're priced too low. Truthfully, this can be a strategy to try and get multiple bids.

If you still live in your home, all showings are managed and scheduled through an app. Super easy, and you set the terms. Baby naps at 1pm? Let's block it off. Hosting a birthday party on Sunday afternoon? No can show. The control is in your hands.

What to Expect:

- Multiple showing requests (sometimes same-day or multiple in a day).
- Keeping your home 'show ready' can be a challenge, but it pays off.
- Offer terms vary, but we'll talk about some of the biggest things next.
- Negotiations often cover not just price, but closing dates, repairs, and concessions.

Pro Tip: Don't stress if an inspection report looks long — inspectors list everything. We'll focus only on what truly matters to a buyer.



The Fun Stuff

Step 6: Getting an Offer

What happens when we get an offer?

Yeehaw, we've got an offer (or multiple). But for the sake of argument, we've got one.

The terms we're looking at:

1. **Purchase Price:** Important, but walk away number is most important.
2. **Due Diligence Fee:** This is a non refundable deposit, paid directly from the buyer to you, the seller.
 - 2.1. When we accept an offer, you'll deposit the check as soon as you receive it.
 - 2.2. Think of this in two ways: It's your fee for taking the house off the market, and it's also the initial part of your proceeds when we close.
3. **Earnest Money:** This is a secondary deposit guarantee. You only receive this if the transaction falls apart after the Due Diligence period.
4. **Dates:** When is the end of Due Diligence (the period for inspections, appraisals and repair quotes) and when do they want to close?
5. **Concessions:** Are they asking for certain costs to be wrapped into the loan via Seller Paid Closing Costs? Do they want you to pay for a home warranty?



A couple of thoughts about offers...

As a listing agent, I want the due diligence amount to be as high as possible, and the due diligence date to be as short as possible. As a buyer's agent, I want the exact opposite. Dancing on that line is part of the negotiation process.

From a seller's perspective, more due diligence money gives you more confidence that a buyer will actually finish the sale, because if they walk away, they lose that money.

In the end, what matters most is your walk-away number. A \$400,000 offer with \$10,000 in Seller Paid Closing Costs is better for you than a \$385,000 with no other concessions.

With the exception of repairs and keeping up your mortgage, there shouldn't be much, if any, money you spend during the transaction. It's all handled at the end, on your final receipt (called a closing disclosure).

What comes next?

Step 7: The Closing Process

The Closing Process and Closing Day

We accepted an offer, now what? Here's how it looks from 30,000 feet in the air.

Due Diligence Period

The buyers have the opportunity to do any and all inspections during this time period. This could include home inspections, an appraisal, secure their financing, etc. Inspections and the appraisal are paid for by the buyer, with the exception of certain inspections required when you accept a VA loan.

Buyers Final Walkthrough

The buyers will likely do a final walkthrough on the day before, or the morning of, closing to make sure that all of your personal items are moved out of the house, and the house is left in a relatively clean condition.

Offer Is Accepted

Congratulations! You're officially under contract.

Negotiate any repairs or buyer credits

You have the option to do all, none, or some of the repair items that a buyer requests during their due diligence period. We can also negotiate a credit in lieu of repairs, where you either provide closing costs to the buyer or pay specific repair invoices on behalf of the buyers at the time of closing.

Closing Day

The buyers will go to the attorneys office, sign all of their documents, and the deed will be transferred. You will sign your documents at the same time in another room, or ahead of time at the attorneys office.

Once the documents are signed and the deed is transferred, you will receive the money from the sale of your home!



What else happens during the closing process?

Once repairs are negotiated and signed off on, we'll end the due diligence period with more confidence that we're headed towards closing. You'll receive an introduction from the buyer's chosen attorney, requesting some required personal information.

If you ever have questions, particularly if something doesn't look right when requesting personal information, you can **ALWAYS** pick up the phone and call the attorney's office.

The closing attorney will ask for your loan number, and they'll order the payoff for your mortgage. Please keep paying your mortgage during the Under Contract phase. They'll also prepare your deed documents for you to sign either on the day of closing, or a few days before.

You'll sign the final documents, hand over keys, and we're off to our next chapter!

Congratulations!!

Common Questions from First Time Sellers

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Do I owe capital gains tax?

Maybe. Most homeowners qualify for exemptions (up to \$250k single/\$500k married). Always check with your CPA.

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Can I buy and sell at the same time?

Yes, but it takes planning. We can explore options like seller possession after closing or short-term rentals. We'll also need to make sure to line up your financing correctly so things go off without a hitch.

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What if I can't find my next home before I put my house on the market?

There are all kinds of financial options, including bridge loans, HELOCs, and rent-back agreements as possible solutions.

Worksheets, Checklists and Sample Documents

Pre-Listing Prep Checklist

- ☐ Declutter each room (remove excess items, minimize furniture)
- ☐ Depersonalize (take down family photos, personal collections)
- ☐ Deep clean all floors, carpets, and surfaces
- ☐ Touch-up paint (neutral tones preferred)
- ☐ Replace burned-out light bulbs
- ☐ Repair minor items (squeaky doors, leaky faucets, loose handles)
- ☐ Mow lawn and trim bushes
- ☐ Add fresh mulch or pine straw
- ☐ Pressure wash siding, porch, driveway (as needed)
- ☐ Clear countertops (limit to 1–2 decorative items)
- ☐ Wipe down cabinets, appliances, and backsplash
- ☐ Organize pantry and cabinets
- ☐ Remove magnets, notes, or clutter from fridge
- ☐ Deep clean showers, tubs, toilets, sinks
- ☐ Re-caulk or re-grout if needed
- ☐ Hang clean, neutral towels
- ☐ Remove personal items (toothbrushes, razors, shampoo bottles)
- ☐ Arrange furniture to maximize space and flow
- ☐ Add fresh pillows/throws to sofas and chairs
- ☐ Remove excessive décor or collectibles
- ☐ Make beds with fresh, neutral bedding
- ☐ Clear nightstands and dressers
- ☐ Organize closets (donate or pack extra clothing)

SELLER ESTIMATED NET SHEET

Prepared for: _____ ("Seller")

Property Address: _____

THE FOLLOWING ARE TYPICAL EXPENSES WHICH A SELLER IS OBLIGATED TO PAY OR IS REQUIRED BY OPERATION OF LAW, AND ALSO INCLUDES ITEMS WHICH MAY BE NEGOTIATED BY CONTRACT AND PRE-MARKETING EXPENSES. SELLER ACKNOWLEDGES AND UNDERSTANDS THAT EACH ESTIMATE HEREON IS AN APPROXIMATION ONLY. SELLER SHOULD VERIFY THE ACCURACY OF THE CALCULATIONS.

SALES PRICE	\$	\$	\$
SETTLEMENT DATE			
MORTGAGES/LIENS			
1st Mortgage Payoff (estimated)			
2nd Mortgage Payoff (estimated)			
Home Equity Loan			
HOA Assessment(s)			
Loans on Equipment for Home			
Other Lien:			
Other Lien:			
CLOSING COSTS			
Attorney Fee/Document Preparation			
Brokerage Fee: % or \$			
Closing Expenses Paid for Buyer			
Express Fees			
Home Warranty			
Miscellaneous (fax, copies, etc.)			
Pro-Rated HOA Dues			
Pro-Rated Taxes			
Recording Fees (estimate)			
Repairs from Home Inspection			
Revenue Stamps (\$1.00 per \$500.00)			
Survey			
Other:			
Other:			
Other:			
Pre-Marketing Inspections			
Appraisal			
Home Inspection			
Pest Inspection			
Radon Inspection			
Well & Septic Inspection Fee			
Other:			
Other:			
TOTAL ESTIMATED SELLER COSTS	\$	\$	\$
ESTIMATED NET PROCEEDS TO/FROM SELLER	\$	\$	\$
LESS DUE DILIGENCE FEE RECEIVED	\$	\$	\$

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Seller Signature _____ Date _____ Seller Signature _____ Date _____

Seller Signature _____ Date _____ Agent Signature _____ Date _____

Meet the Author

Jay Luebke is a seasoned real estate professional based in Raleigh, North Carolina. Since starting his career at 17, he has excelled in helping buyers, sellers, and those relocating to communities like Raleigh, Cary, and Durham. Known for his local expertise, responsiveness, and negotiation skills, Jay has earned 5-star client reviews for his dedication and professionalism.

His goal-oriented, results-driven approach has earned him a spot on the list of RISMedia Newsmakers; an honor designed to recognize individuals making headlines for their contributions to the real estate industry, and positively affecting the communities and consumers they serve.

With more than 13 years in the real estate industry, Jay has deep experience in marketing, operations, product and sales side of the business.



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